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## Engaging aspiring educational leaders in self-reflection regarding race and privilege

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Self-reflection is a vital tool that can be used in the preparation of aspiring school leaders to ensure they can equitably serve the increasingly racially, culturally, linguistically and economically diverse students in schools. When coupled with social justice pedagogy, reflection can also serve as a means of gauging student resistance, growth and understanding of issues of race and privilege. In this study, written self-reflections from educational leadership students exposed to social justice pedagogy were examined, revealing varying degrees of resistance in the form of intense emotions, distancing and opposition for some, and changes in mindset for others. Students also began interrogating their own assumptions, practices and the equity-oriented theories presented. Findings reiterate the utility and need for social justice pedagogy that includes self-reflection in the preparation and continued professional development of educational leaders.

**Keywords:** self-reflection; social justice; educational leadership; race and privilege

### Introduction

A social justice or equity-oriented lens consists of advocating for and keeping issues of race, class, gender, disability, sexual orientation and other marginalizing conditions at the forefront of one's personal and professional beliefs and practices (Theoharis, 2007). Such a lens is vital to educators and particularly pertinent to school leaders (Brooks & Tooms, 2008; Brown, 2004, 2005; Furman, 2012). Aspiring educational leaders in principal preparation programs can build and/or expand on their understanding of multicultural and social justice issues through activities that require self-reflection, such as cultural autobiographies, life history interviews, prejudice-reduction workshops and reflective analysis journals (Brown, 2004). Students can use reflective analysis journals in particular as, 'a means for identifying and clarifying thoughts, feelings, beliefs, perspectives, worldviews, challenges, hopes, and aspirations' (p. 20). Students' written reflections can also be examined to gauge the development of students' critical consciousness (Brown, 2005). Thus, self-reflection is a means for leaders to acknowledge and understand their own prejudices and assumptions that arise from their own cultural backgrounds so they in turn can more aptly identify and address social justice issues in their roles as principals (Furman, 2012). In this way, educational leaders can become more critically conscious and foster equitable educational practices and policies in their schools (Brown, 2005).

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As a majority (82%) of public school leaders in the US today are white (Clifford, 2012), self-reflection is a key aspect to preparing aspiring administrators to equitably serve the increasingly racially, culturally, linguistically and economically diverse students in schools. Frameworks to help guide educational leadership faculty in the preparation of social justice leaders (Brown, 2004; Capper, Theoharis, & Sebastian, 2006; Furman, 2012; Gooden & Dantley, 2012) suggest reflection should be coupled with social justice and equity-oriented literature, as well as opportunities to ‘synthesize the information ... beyond having a working knowledge of a topic or idea to comparing and contrasting opposing views (e.g. view on social justice) and considering them on multiple levels (e.g. individual vis-à-vis institutional)’ (Young, Mountford, & Skrla, 2006, p. 266). An emotionally safe environment (Brown, 2004; Capper et al., 2006) is also needed so that students can be honest, take risks and engage in critical dialogue and written self-reflection (Young et al., 2006). Yet while educational leadership faculty are encouraged to engage in these efforts, there is a dearth of literature examining how educational leadership students actually respond to social justice pedagogy (Young et al., 2006) and develop in their critical consciousness through self-reflection (Boske, 2010; Brown, 2005; Bruner, 2008).

This study specifically draws on the written self-reflections from students enrolled in a sociocultural context of education course that I taught during my first year as faculty in an educational leadership program in Texas. The purpose was to examine how students grappled with their own race and privilege after being exposed to social justice pedagogy. In particular, what realizations, changes in mindset and/or resistance did students exhibit? How did students relate their own understandings of their race and privilege to their roles as educators and aspiring leaders? I felt that examining this particular dataset was a necessary aspect of my own reflective practice as a social justice advocate and multicultural educator. I also intended to use this process to inform future course readings, activities, discussions and the space of self-reflection I foster in the classroom.

### **Theoretical perspective**

Based on their own work and that of Capper and Young (*in press*), Young et al. (2006) indicate educational leadership students often exhibit various forms of resistance when exposed to social justice pedagogy, but suggest such a response is natural and does not need to stifle growth and learning, if properly addressed. Three specific types of resistance have been identified: distancing, opposition and intense emotions. Distancing occurs when a student disassociates her/himself from prejudicial and/or discriminatory notions and practices. This provides students with an opportunity to discuss and analyze such acts without implicating themselves (Young et al., 2006). Students might deny their own privileges associated with being a part of certain groups, yet are able to acknowledge the oppression of other groups or deny the existence of systemic ‘isms’, believing racism, for instance, is solely exhibited through overt and/or individual means.

Opposition is a more active form of resistance that can result in a student’s unwillingness to engage in discussions of ‘isms’ because she/he believes they no longer exist in society. A student may also draw on personal experiences or faulty research to try and deny that oppression exists, or suggest those who are deemed oppressors are in actuality oppressed, as when a student claims reverse discrimination in relation to affirmative action. A student may also refer to faculty or the literature as biased.

Students may also exhibit intense emotions in the form of guilt in being considered part of the dominant oppressive group, anger after admitting to the continued existence of inequities and oppression, and fear in being considered prejudiced. A fearful student may not participate in class discussions at all, in a very limited fashion or participate in an inauthentic way. Experiencing intense emotions is considered part of the transformational learning experience and can encourage as well as hinder the learning process (Young et al., 2006). However, Young et al. (2006) argue that any form of resistance should not be a rationale for excluding provocative literature in courses or engaging aspiring leaders in critical dialogue and reflection. Thus, these forms of resistance helped guide the analysis for this study.

## Method

This study utilized a phenomenological approach to gain a deeper understanding of the experiences of aspiring educational leaders as they engaged with social justice pedagogy and embarked on critical self-reflection. As Van Manen (1990) notes, ‘Phenomenology aims at gaining a deeper understanding of the nature or meaning of our everyday experiences. Phenomenology asks, “What is this or that kind of experience like?”’ (p. 9). More specifically, a phenomenological approach focuses on understanding the essence or nature of a particular lived experience, in this case the experience of aspiring educational leaders reflecting on exposure to social justice pedagogy.

## Context of the course

Participants were enrolled in a social-justice oriented educational leadership program at a university in Texas. The program’s curriculum and core courses are structured to ensure social justice issues are explored through discussions, assignments and self-reflection. The course that provided the context for this study focused on the sociocultural context of education in the US through the exploration of such complex and interrelated issues as race/ethnicity, class, gender and sexual orientation. The class structure acknowledges the challenging and often frightening nature of discussing and dealing with such controversial topics. Therefore, to build a space where students could be honest and open with their feelings and perspectives, students established ground rules on the first day. Rules remained posted in the classroom throughout the course and emphasized respect, honesty and confidentiality.

Course texts were social justice oriented and explored diversity in its multiple forms and included Block’s (2008) *Community: The structure of belonging* and myriad articles on such topics as segregation (Orfield & Lee, 2005), deficit thinking (Valencia & Black, 2002), whiteness (Foley, 2008; McIntosh, 1988), issues of power and privilege (Nieto, 2008; Wildman & Davis, 2008), tools for uncovering inequities and discovering community assets (Kretzmann & McKnight, 2005), critical race theory (Solórzano & Yosso, 2001) and community cultural wealth (Yosso, 2005). Other texts focused on lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and queer and/or questioning (LGBTQ) students and issues (Morris, 2005), funds of knowledge (Moll, Amanti, Neff, & Gonzalez, 1992), cultural responsiveness (Ladson-Billings, 1995) and leadership for social justice (Theoharis, 2007).

Students also completed a school-community project over the duration of the course where they conducted an equity audit of their school by analyzing data related to teacher quality and programmatic and achievement equity (see Skrla,

Scheurich, Garcia, & Nolly, 2004). Students then developed a community profile where they gathered data to uncover assets within and surrounding their school community. Students were to consider the history, physical and social infrastructure, and the human/intellectual and financial capital in the school and community. Students also created a community assets map (Kretzmann & McKnight, 2005) and included a self-reflection on the entire experience. The final aspect of the project required that students create a digital story to showcase their understanding, reflections and synthesis of the data gathered.

Students completed two additional five-page written self-reflections at various points in the course. The reflections were individual assignments where students were asked to indicate how the readings and discussions up to that point related to their own values, beliefs and practices as educators and future leaders. Students were also asked to indicate how and why readings changed, challenged or aligned with their personal and professional selves. In addition, students participated in activities that aimed to raise their critical consciousness and multicultural competence. This included taking part in a privilege walk, completing a race literacy quiz (California Newsreel, 2003), identifying and mapping their own privileges on a matrix, and becoming familiar with common language utilized in the LGBTQ community.

### *Author's positionality*

As a qualitative researcher, it is important that I acknowledge my own background and positionality, as this shapes my perspectives and understandings of students' experiences in the course and my analysis of their written reflections. I identify as a Mexican American female who was born and raised along the South Texas border. I am a former bilingual public school teacher and counselor, which provided me formal training and experience in discussing and addressing my own personal issues and beliefs and those of others, as well as topics such as race and privilege that may make others without such training and experience uncomfortable. My own schooling experiences as a person of color and my professional training and experience inform my belief systems and pedagogy within the classroom, which are social justice oriented. Admittedly, my social justice orientation impacted my desire and ability to address race and privilege in the course, while the focus of the course also lent itself to this content.

I also remained cognizant of my own positionality when analyzing my students' reflections, recognizing that I might not agree with some of my students' views on or opposition to social justice issues discussed. Therefore, I focused on being accepting and personally non-judgmental of students' comments. If I read what I perceived as prejudicial or racist comments from a student in their reflection, I considered such an expression as an opportunity for the student to grow. I also considered the value in providing the safe space for students to share such personal perspectives.

### *Data sources and analysis*

Data for this study included three self-reflections written by each of the 19 students in the course (13 white females, 2 white males, 3 Latina females and 1 Latino male), for a total of 57 reflections. All students were educators in Texas with varying years of experience. Institutional Review Board approval was obtained to utilize student reflections as existing sources of data. Analyzing reflections was considered 'an

informative, unobtrusive data collection method rich in portraying the values and beliefs of participants' (Brown, 2005, p. 20). Students were encouraged to consider reflections as journal entries:

A private place for issue review, honest critical reflection, and self-analysis ... [where they could] expand their awareness, make connections, and generate new thoughts. They identify principals and approaches learned, explain how this new information might be applied, and explore these discoveries in light of personal and professional growth and development. (Brown, 2004, p. 100)

Reflections were utilized to conduct a thematic analysis. In phenomenological research, 'themes may be understood as the structures of experience. So when we analyze a phenomenon, we are trying to determine what the themes are, the experiential structures that make up that experience' (Van Manen, 1990, p. 79). In this process, I focused on unearthing 'something "telling," something "meaningful," something "thematic" in the various experiential accounts' of students (Van Manen, 1990, p. 86). Reflections were examined individually taking into account the various types of resistance (Young et al., 2006) that could be exhibited through distancing, opposition or intense emotions such as guilt, anger or fear.

### **Findings**

Students' reflections revealed how they were challenged by the course content, and how this facilitated questioning of their own beliefs, and for many enabled changes in mindset after examining their own positionalities and privileges within the socio-cultural context of education. Although all students made connections between the social justice concepts presented and the practical implications their new knowledge could have in their schools and in their personal lives, there were some students who expressed resistance to accepting their own role in contributing to inequities in schools and society. Whether it was through distancing, outright opposition or through the expression of guilt, these forms of resistance were seen as consistent with what Young et al. (2006) consider 'a normal and accepted aspect of any course attending to social justice issues' (p. 268). At the least, students questioned and contended with their own values and beliefs and the impact of these in education. Findings also suggest that the discomfort and struggle that students experienced in reflecting on issues of race and privilege did assist them in their development as social justice leaders.

### ***Lack of critical consciousness raises strong, disturbed emotions***

A number of students expressed their disbelief in their own 'ignorance' regarding the pervasiveness of systemic racism, privilege and oppression within education and other societal institutions. Through their reflections, students were able to consider the reality of how race and racism is central to the experiences of students nationwide, including students in their own communities and how they might have contributed to such oppression. Betty expressed the 'outrage' she felt when she discovered how racism and institutional discrimination contributed to the creation of ghettos and resulted in urban sprawl, and consequently impacted segregation in schools. 'I never stopped to think that at some point in history, ghettos had been anything but run-down. I hadn't considered that the privileged once lived there when

the homes were new', she said. 'The idea of blacks [sic] and Hispanics approaching homes and white [sic] frightened faces packing up to leave as quickly as possible flashed through my mind'. In her final reflection Betty made the connection between history and the current reality in her school community. In completing her community assets map she discovered the city's segregated cemetery.

The clarity of our history struck my heart that day. Walking in that cemetery, I saw that this wasn't just viewing something through a historical lens. It was witnessing in a real and concrete way the inequity of our systems that remain long after we pass. What followed was more clarity. I hadn't realized that white flight applied to [my school] in [town], a fairly small town. In my mind, white flight applied to cities like New York, Chicago, even Austin. Not [town], or so I thought. The data clearly told the story of white flight in the suburbs.

Like Betty, Patty felt particularly moved by the same reading, Orfield and Lee's (2005) *Why segregation matters: Poverty and educational inequality*. Patty reflected disappointingly on her own lack of knowledge regarding the reality of segregated schools in the US.

[The] article really stated the stark reality of the educational situation that is occurring in poor inner city schools. The fact that these schools are still so segregated is unreal. I often consider it a "big city" problem. I think about Compton or Watts because these are places I have heard about on television and in history books and media. The fact that this is occurring in [my city] is surprising to me. My own ignorance amazes me.

It is evident that Patty had not previously considered how the schools in her own community were racially segregated and impacted in similar ways as other schools in more urban areas. Yet ironically, in naming 'Compton or Watts' as cities that she believed did face segregation speaks further to the stereotypes associated with and perpetuated in the media.

Sara confessed how several readings 'truly shook my thinking to the core'. The notion of deficit thinking sparked 'a disturbed feeling of emotion' for her as she recognized: 'I could have on numerous occasions been guilty of making assumptions about my students' parents and their role in their children's education'. Sara was able to personally connect with the concept of deficit thinking by being truly honest about how she may have contributed to inequities in schools and not necessarily valued the experiential knowledge of communities of color or other marginalized communities.

Other students such as Tess, while initially disappointed with their ignorance, felt empowered in recognizing their biases and developing a deeper understanding of social justice issues. 'The meaning of privilege never really crossed my mind until I was asked to think and dialogue about it'. She explained how previously, 'privilege to me was merely something you earned or something that you worked hard to obtain', but 'the word privilege has taken on a whole different meaning to me and has implications that will affect me as a classroom teacher and as a future school leader'. The reflection by Tess illuminated her increased understanding about the centrality of race and racism, and its intersectionality with other forms of oppression.

### ***Grappling with white privilege is 'uncomfortable' but necessary***

As a majority of students identified as white and had, as one student indicated, probably been 'blissfully unaware' of the privilege that came with their race within

schools and society, many experienced ‘shame’ or ‘guilt’ in coming to terms with their white privilege. However, as Young et al. (2006) indicate, these are common feelings of resistance that often emerge among students when exposed to social justice pedagogy. Other students felt ‘a rollercoaster of emotions’, but ultimately the urgency to act in order to rectify systemic inequities.

For some students, such as Ellen, acknowledging their white privilege came to the fore after reading Peggy McIntosh’s (1988) ‘White privilege: Unpacking the invisible knapsack’. Ellen realized she ‘enjoyed unearned skin privilege’ yet did not like being ‘seen as an oppressor, or oppressive, just because of my skin color’. She expressed distancing and opposition:

I can’t help that I was born that way. So, why is it fair for someone to judge me solely based on my skin color? ... If we are talking about not placing judgment on people and not being racist towards others, why do we continue to make all of these assumptions about a group of people when in that group of people, everyone has a different story?

Ellen admitted that all of her questions could not be answered, but the fact that she was questioning her privilege and the continued existence of systemic racism was a start to getting her to critically think about social justice issues.

Jack was ‘disturbed, challenged and shocked’ by course content, realizing ‘the luxuries and privileges I have been afforded by our society as a white male have kept me blissfully unaware of the challenges and difficulties people from cultures and races other than my own have to face every day’. He recognized ‘how people who fit the idealized “norm” in this country are put on a path that leads to an educational and financial advantage over others’. While his ‘initial reaction to this realization was that of guilt’, he felt this did ‘nothing to level the playing field for all’. Instead, he found ‘the real purpose of these readings is to inspire action ... to ensure an equitable education for all students, not just the ones who look and talk like me’.

Joe began recognizing the privileges associated with being a white male, but argued privilege was situational and that in some instances he too might be marginalized: ‘A white person might not feel very privileged if they wish to pursue a career as a rap musician ... [or] a male may not feel privileged when facing a judge pertaining to custody of his children’. Joe’s means of ‘flipping’ the issue evidenced his opposition (Young et al., 2006, p. 268). Yet he agreed ‘there are aspects in my life where they [white and male privilege] have played a great role in propelling me’. He admitted ‘whether privilege is situational or not, it is impossible to negate that it does in fact exist in many aspects of our lives, whether we have a direct control over it or not’. While Joe recognized schools and other institutions in society are not race neutral or meritocratic, his resistance indicated the need for continued growth.

Ruby was another student that also exhibited resistance in the form of distancing and opposition. She admitted how she was ‘definitely one of those who felt this [inequitable and racist] treatment was something that had occurred in the past and no longer was happening’, in part because she believed that ‘everyone is in charge of his/her own destiny’. She explained how the readings made ‘it is obvious that some people have a harder time than others being “successful” but I still feel that opportunities to achieve are out there’. Her responses reflected the struggle she was having in maintaining her belief in the US as a meritocratic society in light of the course readings that negated this notion. As discussions about this issue continued in class, she further exhibited her resistance:

But generally when you get down to it people of privilege are not going to give up the things they have access to in order to build a community or to benefit others until America stops promoting the individualistic society ... As a person who is White I find the struggle [to] be White very intriguing, as I have never sought to be a color other than the one that I am.

In admitting that she had never wanted to be of another race other than what she was only reiterated the privilege that comes with being white. Recognizing and understanding white privilege was troublesome for most students, but even for those who opposed it, exposure to texts, discussions and opportunities for self-reflection proved impactful.

### ***Recognizing complexity of being both the oppressor and the oppressed***

Some students became cognizant of how the intersectionality of their social identities accounted for being simultaneously oppressors in some ways and oppressed in others. This was Alex's daily reality: 'Many teachers often assume that because I am a Mexican American teacher I will automatically be able to forge connections with Mexican American students'. Yet, 'because I have the benefit of a college education and do not speak Spanish, I do not always have the connections with Mexican American students that others assume'. He referred to readings that helped him make sense of his dual role as oppressor/oppressed:

Foley (2008) speaks of the "wages of whiteness" that many Hispanics enjoy based on class, citizenship, and culture, and I realized how this pertained to me. Reading Wildman and Davis also forced me to acknowledge that I have access to resources and power that others may not have. At the same time, I do not have the same access to power and resources that other privileged groups enjoy. For example, as a gay male, I have to consider the consequences of having a picture of my partner and me in my classroom, while my heterosexual colleagues probably do not have such concerns.

Nadine also recognized how she was marginalized in being lesbian and female, yet privileged in being middle class and white. This realization was sparked by a quote from Audre Lorde's (1984) *Sister outsider* : 'In America, this norm is usually defined as white, thin, male, young, heterosexual, Christian, and financially secure. It is with this mythical norm that the trappings of power reside within society' (p. 116). Nadine explained:

When you are the norm, you don't have to think about your state of being. I can relate to this because of my race. I rarely think about my whiteness ... Though not intentional, my whiteness allows the luxury of unawareness. I do, however, often think about my sexual orientation. Because it is socially acceptable to outspokenly disagree with the "gay lifestyle" and to believe that gays should be denied the basic right of marriage and other privileges, I have to think about my sexuality quite often. This gives me insight to how people of other races might feel. A big difference, of course, is that I can choose to hide, to not reveal whom I love, and to meld in with the norm. A person of a different race is not usually afforded this luxury.

Helen, a Latina whose husband was white, was able to make sense of her childhood experiences through course readings and connect her understandings to her current role as an educator. In this process she recognized that she had attended predominantly white schools and 'often felt marginalized' because of this, yet as an educator she was unintentionally 'promoting oppression' by not considering the experiential knowledge of her diverse students.

Growing up I attended a predominately white school. I was one of three Hispanic children in my high school and often felt marginalized. When I would go over to my friends' homes their parents would often tell me, "Wow you speak so well." I always said thank you, but wondered why they would think I would not speak well ...

Helen confessed to her lack of critical consciousness saying, 'Racism is never something I really thought about as an educator. I knew that it existed, but I was unaware of how present racism is in our daily lives'. She concluded, 'The teaching that I promote encourages students to hide their culture and insist on whiteness to be successful'. She explained that this 'created a great deal of self-reflection to take place'. 'My lesson plans need to be reworked, I need to reduce my deficit thinking, and embrace each student's funds of knowledge. Without taking those steps I will be keeping a cycle of oppression in my classroom'. In reading Helen's reflections, it was clear to see how her critical consciousness was awakened and had evolved over the span of the course. She had gone from being reflective and accepting of her own role in being oppressed and an oppressor to putting forth a plan to empower all of her students and particularly value the knowledge of those from diverse and historically marginalized communities.

### *Addressing race and privilege as educators and leaders*

All students made the connection between how their race and privileges impacted their roles as educators and leaders and in this process vocalized their hopes to change systemic inequities. Having students analyze their beliefs, hidden assumptions and roles as oppressors was the first step. This sparked intentions of change in terms of pedagogical practice and in everyday decisions.

Karina seemed to have an epiphany after a particular class discussion that she could not 'opt out' of the privileges that she did have. She said 'that what really matters is what I choose to do with this privilege. If I choose to use my privilege to build a more socially just classroom, where each child has an equal opportunity to learn then I have taken the first step'. Karina acknowledged the challenges that this would entail, particularly in not being discouraged because 'I can't change the world by myself and sometimes that makes me feel like I am not doing enough'. Yet if she could 'take a step back and put the emotions aside for a moment, I understand, though, that the little changes I make in my classroom can make a difference'. She realized the value in making a difference in the life of even just one child, so that they could then 'be an agent of change themselves'. She spoke further to her future role as a leader:

As a leader, if I can make that type of fundamental shift so that all teachers in our school realize the privileges they bring to the table, then perhaps those teachers will go back to their classrooms and all of a sudden we have more than just a handful of students who can go out and make differences for our future.

Holly had 'never considered' herself 'to be privileged' because of her whiteness until she engaged with the course texts. Reflecting on her white privilege, she shared her hopes for being 'an effective educational leader' who would be 'committed to engaging in more conversations with teachers, parents, and students who may not always fit within privileged categories'. Her commitment extended into her personal life, 'I am now dedicated to raising my children's awareness of the privileges we

take for granted and model for them how taking risks can open up avenues for others to access these privileges’.

Kate was particularly moved by the privilege walk and personally and professionally identified with the list of invisible privileges offered in Peggy McIntosh’s (1988) work. They ‘really made me think, [as] there are things that I have taken for granted as a white middle class woman’. She recognized how ‘because of this, I sometimes forget that everyone does not start at the same place, or have the same opportunities’. As she looked to her future as a school leader she felt ‘more aware of where others may have started, and how we may consciously or unconsciously be perpetuating the problem’ and began to ask ‘a new set of questions’. For example, she wondered, ‘What are we as a school missing out on because we are not making enough of an effort to connect with an entire set of parents? What amazing voices are silenced because we are choosing not [to] listen?’ In identifying with and reflecting on their own race and privilege, students gained a deeper understanding of the inequities perpetuated in schools, their roles in contributing to this cycle and their roles as future leaders in addressing inequities. While aspirations do not provide evidence for change, reflections indicate active engagement with the course texts and provide hope of their commitment to enact change.

### **Discussion and conclusion**

Examining how my first cohort of educational leadership students grappled with being exposed to social justice pedagogy through their self-reflections proved insightful. While a majority of students did not exhibit resistance through opposition or distancing, many expressed intense emotions such as guilt. Over the duration of the course, students’ mindsets progressed and they were more apt to make connections between research and theory and their own assumptions, social identities and positionalities within schools and society. They began to realize how these understandings informed their practice as educators and future leaders.

Since examining students’ written reflections for the purpose of this study, I have taught the course four more times. The written self-reflection assignments remain requisites in the course. The utility of the self-reflections has been evidenced by how honest and revealing students have been. I have found that the written reflections have particularly provided students who are not as willing to share their perspectives during open classroom discussions with an opportunity to express themselves more freely. Some students have also utilized the reflections to express their opposition to comments made by other peers during discussions as well. Students continue to use the reflective assignments as a safe space where they can question their own biases and reconsider their stances on social justice issues.

Overall, findings from this study are useful to current and future educational leadership faculty and school leaders who utilize or are intending to adopt social justice pedagogy that includes self-reflection through dialogue and/or written format. It is pertinent that they should be aware of the manner in which students/staff can potentially react or resist, so that they might personally and professionally prepare themselves to handle such responses. Instructors and school leaders who are comfortable and/or trained to address issues of race, privilege and inequity are probably more apt to deal with resistance from students/staff. However, novice faculty and school leaders may not be as knowledgeable on how to respond.

Sue et al. (2011) offer a number of strategies that can be used to specifically deal with difficult racial dialogues in the classroom that might be useful in such cases. Strategies include self-disclosing personal biases and mistakes to convey one's humanity, and providing personal and concrete examples when discussing issues of social injustice. Professors and school leaders should also be equally willing to facilitate the exploration of students'/staff experiences and personally check-in with individuals or the whole group after heated discussions. Faculty and school leaders must also be aware of their impact, and work to develop positive relationships with students/staff to assist with a true transformational process. Professional development and training opportunities for additional support to sustain social justice work is also suggested.

In conclusion, findings reiterate the need for social justice pedagogy in educational leadership programs that includes various forms of self-reflection. There must be continued effort to examine the degree to which principal preparation programs are truly leading by example and engaging in the difficult but necessary verbal and written dialogue and self-reflection regarding race and privilege. Finally, future research can draw on a larger sample of students or can explore how students continue in their reflective practice once they take on school leadership roles.

### Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author.

### Note on contributor

Melissa A. Martinez is Assistant Professor in Education & Community Leadership at Texas State University. Her research focuses on equity and access issues along the P-16 educational pipeline for students of color, primarily college access and readiness issues, the preparation of equity-oriented educational leaders, and faculty of color in academia.

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